

We claim:

1. A computer implemented method for selecting rules from a rules repository to validate information submitted on an electronic form comprising the steps of:

a) creating a validation rules repository on a computer;

5 b) in response to receiving a connection request, establishing a connection with the created rules repository; and

c) in response to receiving a rule request, retrieving the selected rule from the rules repository for incorporation into the electronic form.

10 2. The method as described in claim 1 further comprising before said retrieving step (c), the step of displaying at least one rule from the rules repository in response to a rule request.

3. The method as described in claim 2 wherein said step (a) further comprises
15 establishing a plurality of categories of rules and storing the rules in the plurality of categories according to rule type.

4. The method as described in claim 3 wherein rule categories comprise alphabet and number categories.

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5. The method as described in claim 3 wherein rule types comprise name, zip code, telephone number, city, state and address, and credit card number.

6. The method as described in claim 3 wherein said displaying step further
25 comprises displaying a category of validation rules.

7. The method as described in claim 6 further comprising before said displaying step, the step of receiving the rule request containing an identification of a specific validation rules category.

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8. The method as described in claim 7 wherein said displaying step further comprises displaying only rules from the identified validation rules category.

9. The method as described in claim 8 wherein said rule retrieval step further
5 comprises receiving an identification of a rule in the specific validation rules category and retrieving the identified rule from the rules repository.

10. The method as described in claim 1 wherein said step (c) further comprises the steps of:

10 receiving a description of a desired rule;
searching the repository for rules matching the rule description;
displaying all rules matching the rule description; and
retrieving a rule selected from the displayed rules matching the rule description.

15 11. The method as described in claim 1 further comprising before said step (c) the steps of:

receiving a validation rule description;
searching the rules repository for rules matching the rule description;
determining whether there are any rules that match the validation rule description;
20 sending a query to the user to create a new rule when no rule matches the validation rule description; and
retrieving a newly created rule.

12. The method as described in claim 11 further comprising the step of storing the
25 newly created rule in the rule repository.

13. The method as described in claim 1 further comprising after said step (c), the step of incorporating the retrieved rule into the electronic form.

14. The method as described in claim 13 wherein said incorporating step further comprises:

- identifying a field in the electronic form;
- attaching the selected rule to the identified form field; and
- 5 retrieving validation software for the attached rule.

15. A computer implemented method for creating a repository for rules to validate information submitted on an electronic form comprising the steps of:

creating electronic form validation rules;

10 (a) creating a record for each identified validation rule, the record containing a plurality of fields with information about the rule and a link to software that performs the validation of that rule on information in an electronic form that incorporates that rule;

(b) storing the record for an identified validation rule and the corresponding software for that validation rule in the rule repository; and

15 (c) repeating the above steps for each newly created rule.

16. The method as described in claim 15 further comprising the step of creating a set of sub-directories in the rule repository, each sub directory would contain at least two categories of validation rules and a plurality of validation rule types under each rule category.

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17. The method as described in claim 16 wherein rule types comprise name, zip code, telephone number, city, state and address, and credit card number.

25 18. The method as described in claim 17 further comprising the step of identifying a rule type for a newly created rule.

19. A system for selecting rules to validate information submitted on an electronic form comprising:

(a) a repository for storing electronic form validation rules;

5 (b) a computing device connected to said validation rules repository, said computing device capable of interfacing with said repository for the purpose of retrieving form validation rules for incorporation into electronic forms; and

(c) an interface connected to said computing device and said validation rules repository for facilitating communication between said repository and said computing device.

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20. The system as described in claim 19 wherein said repository comprises a set validation rule sub-directories in which the rules are stored, said directories being based on categories of validation rules.

15 21. The system as described in claim 20 wherein each validation rule stored in the repository comprises a record containing a description of the requirement that rule enforces and a pointer to the location in repository of software that executes the validation of that rule on an electronic form.

20 22. The system as described in claim 19 wherein said interface is a computing network.

23. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for selecting rules from a rules repository to validate information submitted on an electronic form
25 comprising:

a) instructions for creating a validation rules repository on a computer;

b) in response to receiving a connection request, instructions for establishing a connection with the created rules repository; and

30 c) in response to receiving a rule request, instructions for retrieving the selected rule from the rules repository for incorporation into the electronic form.

24. The computer program product as described in claim 23 further comprising before said retrieving instructions (c), instructions for displaying at least one rule from the rules repository in response to a rule request.

5 25. The computer program product as described in claim 24 wherein said instructions (a) further comprise instructions for establishing a plurality of categories of rules and instructions for storing the rules in the plurality of categories according to rule type.

10 26. The computer program product as described in claim 23 wherein said displaying instructions further comprise instructions for displaying a category of validation rules.

27. The computer program product as described in claim 26 further comprising before said displaying instructions, instructions for receiving the rule request containing an identification of a specific validation rules category.

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28. The computer program product as described in claim 23 wherein said retrieving instructions (c) further comprise:

instructions for receiving a description of a desired rule, the description containing the rule category;

20 instructions for searching the repository for rules matching the rule description;

instructions for displaying all rules matching the rule description; and

instructions for retrieving a rule selected from the displayed rules matching the rule description.

29. The computer program product as described in claim 23 further comprising before said retrieving instructions (c):

instructions for receiving a validation rule descriptor;

instructions for searching the rules repository for rules matching the rule
5 description;

instructions for determining whether there are any rules that match the validation rule description;

instructions sending a query to the user to create a new rule when no rule matches the validation rule descriptor; and

10 instructions retrieving a newly created rule.

30. The computer program product as described in claim 23 further comprising after said retrieving instructions (c), instructions for incorporating the retrieved rule into the electronic form.

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31. The computer program product as described in claim 30 wherein said incorporating instructions further comprise:

instructions for identifying a field in the electronic form;

instructions for attaching the selected rule to the identified form field; and

20 instructions for retrieving validation software for the attached rule.